

St Marc Grenoble
Sunday 18th May 2021 (Easter 7)
Acts 1: 1 - 14
John 17: 1 - 19
'What Next'

PRAY

Can anyone tell me why we had a public holiday, and what we celebrated on Thursday? Yes, Ascension Day!

What do we celebrate on Ascension Day?

Jesus, after His life and death on earth, and after His resurrection, which conquered the power of death, was taken back into heaven – back to base – back to where He belongs, where He is our direct, unrestricted link to God.

The story of the Ascension is the bridge between Luke's Gospel – his story of Jesus' life on earth, and his second volume 'The Acts of the Apostles'. Both of these 'Books' were written by Luke.

The Gospel tells us about Jesus' Ministry while He was on earth; the Acts of the Apostles tells about His ministry, through the Holy Spirit; and the growth of the young Christian church.

So, it's the end of the beginning, and the beginning of the next phase!

Luke says in the first verse of Acts "I told you all that Jesus **began** to do and to teach. The way it's written clearly indicates that we as Jesus' current day disciple, or followers, are expected to continue what Jesus began. Luke's record in Acts encourages us to continue in that same direction..

The pattern of Jesus' life and work should shape the direction of our life and work – we are called to live in His image; and those chosen by Jesus – apostles – still receive their instructions and their empowerment through the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus promised in v.8

Of course most people simply couldn't believe Jesus had risen from the dead (that's still true today)

But, in the NTFE we read the disciples were convinced that He is still alive by 'many proofs' - We're told Jesus presented himself to them and He was seen by them for 40 days.

During that time He met them; ate with them; showed them the wounds in His hands and feet; He spoke with them about the Kingdom of God; He interpreted scripture for them – specifically the prophecies which predicted everything that had, by then, actually happened.

Jesus also commissioned them to continue His ministry. And in exactly the same way, He commissions us to continue His ministry too. He tells us to GO into all the world and proclaim the Gospel.

Jesus told the disciples to first wait in Jerusalem, until they received the gift the Father had promised to them – to be 'equipped' by the Holy Spirit.

Then, they were to 'be His witnesses' - to tell the Good News about Him in Jerusalem, all over Judea & Samaria - even to the ends of the world.

As Jesus finished telling them all these things, He blessed them, and an amazing thing happened. As they watched, He was taken up, before their very eyes and disappeared into the cloud!

That doesn't happen very often, does it?! They stood there – gobsmacked! Wondering what on earth was happening and what may happen next. **(Can anyone think of another similar event?- Elijah - 50 men searched for 3 days, but they couldn't find him)**

But then, two men in white (- angels?) told the disciples to stop gazing into heaven - and to get on with what they'd been commissioned to do.

That's what I love about Jesus! He does amazing things, and expects us to take it in our stride and get on with the job!!

When I worked in Kent, the local paper quoted me as describing the Christian faith as 'like being on a rollercoaster' and - It's breathtaking!

What happened next? How did the disciples handle all this?

We're told that after Jesus ascended out of their sight, they left the Mount of Olives, went back into Jerusalem, as they'd been instructed, and returned to the upper room, and had a Council meeting!

They agreed they were in this for good, and - we're told, joined together single - heartedly, along with the women folk, in prayer.

They'd heard what Jesus promised. They did as He told them and prepared themselves for the next stage by praying together.

I think that's a wonderful example for us; we've celebrated the Ascension together and now we should get down to preparing for the next stage in our ministry by getting down to some serious prayer.

It strikes me that, if we're ever uncertain about our future, our role in life, or our mission - that is a very good model to follow: Pray it through, seek God's

support; wait on Him and ask for His help and direction.

Of course, at that point, the disciples had not yet experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit - that was to come in a few more days; a very definite and powerful answer to prayer. (We have the benefit of hindsight!)

But in my personal experience it did not finish there. Whenever I've been really stuck, I've sought the help of the Holy Spirit and - often to my amazement - the Holy Spirit never fails!!

Finally, I'd just like to 'tie in' our view with Jesus; and we get a really clear picture of that from today's Gospel -

The God we worship and serve does not leave His children directionless or comfortless. But, you must be open to seeking, and accepting His help - doing things His way, which is not necessarily the way we want, or expect.

We serve a wonderful God who does not fail - despite the fact that our faith often does!

Your homework for this week: – Go home & read John 17 again! It is meaty, and chewy. It tells us exactly what Jesus expects from us and how He will help us – it's a wonderful passage! – Jesus prays for us to experience His joy, completed in us.

He asks His Father to protect us from the evil one, to sanctify us, and consecrate us, as we set about the mission He's given us. And, He confirms that He will be in us.

With assurances like that we have to be excited, and we cannot possibly do anything other than to serve exactly as we're called – so NOW is the time to be sure you know your calling!

Let's Pray: Lord help us to hear your voice, and to know exactly what you are calling us to do. Come Holy Spirit